



Memorial Day 2010 Update

- For a grateful nation to be truly great, we must continue to build a legacy of honor for our fallen heroes. Although I believe we have made progress fulfilling this legacy, it is my hope on this Memorial Day, that we demonstrate this honor by caring for their comrades and families today and the whole year through.
- Memorial Day will take on a more profound and personal significance for many American families this year – those who are mourning the loss of one of their own and those who have loved ones far from home. In this time of war, our grateful nation honors the mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, friends and neighbors who have made the ultimate sacrifice.
- This great nation must recommit to supporting and caring for the more than 1.9 million troops who have been deployed, the more than 1 million new veterans of the current conflicts, and the 23 million veterans from previous conflicts.

Talking Points: Veterans' Funding and Advance Appropriations

- Congress has made great strides in providing benefits to the men and women who have defended our nation. This Congress understands that treating our veterans is a cost of war. As we fund the war, we must fund the warrior.
- Congress successfully secured advance appropriations for the VA, for the first time allowing the VA to plan medical spending one year in advance with the full assurance of funds.
- Under Democratic leadership, Congress has provided **a 60% increase** in discretionary VA funding mainly used to provide medical care to veterans. This is more of an increase in three years than the GOP-controlled Congress provided in 12 years despite increased military operations.
- Instead of simply talking about sufficient, timely, and predictable funding for veterans, President Obama and the Democratic Congress continue to deliver budgets worthy of the service of veterans.



House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Chairman Bob Filner

Budget Highlights

Congress has approved landmark budget increases – providing an additional \$23 billion to help our veterans receive health care and other benefits that they deserve and have earned with their service to this country. Most of the funding increase was directed to expand medical services and update aging VA medical facilities.

As a result of budget increases:

- VA was able to open the health care system to new non-service connected, Priority Group 8 veterans by raising the income threshold by 10 percent to enroll 193,000 new veterans, with plans to raise the income threshold by 15 percent to enroll an additional 99,000 veterans.
- Thousands of new mental health providers have been hired, veterans now have access to mental health treatment while receiving primary care, new Vet Centers have opened, and mobile mental health care is more accessible to all veterans.
- Women veterans who are eligible for and use the VA health care system will have access to more appropriate care, including mental health care professionals that have been trained to care for women veterans that have suffered sexual trauma or experience post-traumatic stress.
- Veterans living in rural areas have new access points available to receive VA health care, including expanded use of telehealth and telemedicine, and can now work directly with a new Office of Rural Health.
- Transitional housing and supportive services for the 130,000 homeless veterans who are homeless on any given night have been strengthened, along with a new focus on homeless prevention programs.



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Caregiver Bill Background

On May 5, 2010, President Obama signed The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-163) into law. This new law demonstrates America's commitment to the dedicated service members who have served in uniform and puts front and center the health care needs of veterans and their families. P.L. 111-163 addresses emerging needs that have been voiced by veterans and their advocates from around the country while also addressing lingering issues that have plagued veterans for years.

Provides Caregiver Support: Provides immediate support for veteran caregivers by creating a program to offer caregiver training, access to mental health counseling, and 24-hour respite care in the veteran's home. This allows caregivers temporary relief without having to leave the veteran at a medical facility. Veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) are eligible to select a caregiver to receive a financial stipend along with travel and lodging expenses associated with the veteran's care.

Increases Mental Health Care Access: Addresses the troubling reality of post-traumatic stress and troubling incidents of suicide among the veteran population. P.L. 111-163 requires a much-needed and long-awaited study on veterans' suicide and requires the VA to provide counseling referrals for members of the Armed Forces who are not otherwise eligible for readjustment counseling.

Welcomes Home Women Veterans: Expands and improves VA services for the 1.8 million women veterans currently receiving VA health care – AND goes one step further by anticipating the expected increase of women warriors over the next five years. This bill seeks to build a VA health care system respectful of the unique medical needs of women veterans. For the first time, VA will be authorized to provide health care for newborn infants of women veterans.

Rural Health Care: Improves the health care provided to our rural veterans by authorizing stronger partnerships with community providers and the Department of Health and Human Services, and also requires the VA to establish a grant program for veteran service organizations to provide transportation options to veterans living in highly rural areas.

Prevents Veteran Homelessness: Expands the number of places where homeless veterans may receive supportive services. For veterans struggling without a roof over their heads, this small change in the law will make a big difference in their lives.





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Post-9/11 G.I. Bill Update

- Since the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill went into effect in August 2009, \$1.2 billion in education benefits has been paid to veteran students, including members of the Guard and Reserve. These benefits have been expanded to children of fallen troops following September 11, 2001.
- VA has issued Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefit payments to 249,882 individuals and their educational institutions. More than 450,000 veterans have been certified as eligible to use this new program.
- VA plans to introduce a new automated claims system for Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits by the summer of 2010 and will later migrate from the interim processing solution.



Addressing the Housing Needs of Veterans

- House Democrats have forcefully responded to the mortgage and foreclosure crisis that has plagued the economy, and more importantly, has personally affected too many veterans. Congress increased the maximum VA home loan guaranty amount, expanded expiring adjustable rate mortgage programs, eliminated equity requirements for refinancing, provided foreclosure prevention remedies for service members and veterans, and enhanced specially adapted housing benefits.
- Our courageous service members and veterans should never be forced to worry about their homes while they dealing with the intense stresses of deployment, or while focusing on reintegration to civilian life following combat duties.



Preventing Veteran Homelessness

- The House passed H.R. 4810, the End Veteran Homelessness Act of 2010, which increases funding to successful programs for homeless veterans, requires each VA medical center that provides supporting housing services to provide housing counselors, strengthens permanent housing programs, and pays special interest to the needs of homeless women veterans and homeless veterans with children. This bill will complement provisions of P.L. 111-163 which also combat veteran homelessness.
- Congress has a willing partner in the Obama Administration, which has committed the resources and necessary support to achieve the goal of ending veteran homelessness in 5 years. It is unacceptable that even one of our veterans sleeps on the streets or in shelters after risking his or her life for this country.

